

## *Have You Met?*



**Torrie Taj**

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### **Torrie Taj**

**Hometown:** Aberdeen, SD

**Resident:** Gilbert, AZ

**Education:** ASU, Fear the Fork!

**Profession:** CEO, Child Crisis Arizona

**Status:** Single

**Family:** MOM of three amazing teens (19, 15, and 13) and a loyal lab

**Story by:** Colleen Westberg

**Have You Met Torrie Taj?**

A caring and competent professional, Torrie Taj brings her considerable experience and expertise to leading Child Crisis Arizona. In 2015, two organizations in existence for seventy years--Crisis Nursery, Inc, and Child Crisis Center, merged to create Child Crisis Arizona and to better serve the thousands of Arizona's most vulnerable and neglected.

"It is a great story how I came to be CEO of Child Crisis Arizona. I actually wasn't looking for a move, as I had been 25 years at another agency. Even when I was in college, I knew I needed meaningful work for my career. As a student I volunteered at Prehab of Arizona, which I later was able to rebrand as A New Leaf. I worked my way up from volunteer to eventually finishing as the Deputy CEO. When I started, we had 50 employees and I got to help grow it to 350 employees. I realized I had reached as far as I could go; I agreed to talk to a recruiter, and it seemed that my interview matched their needs."

When I found out they were recruiting for the merged entity not yet renamed, I knew I couldn't pass up this wonderful opportunity. It will be a year for me September 1 and I am still so excited about leading these two agencies that are forged into a strong new entity. Crisis Nursery, Inc. and Child Crisis Center were long-time small nonprofits started from the grassroots. Both have a deep history with the community. Now they are seen not as competitors, but as one streamlined organization. Each group had different strengths, so by being together we are growing quickly, replicating programs and are seeing progress and momentum from this merger!"

She grew up in Aberdeen, SD, in the northeast part of the state, but at a young age Torrie knew she didn't like cold weather. "My grandparents would spend their winters in Arizona, so when I visited them while I was in high school, I took a tour of ASU. I realized this was the place for me, and didn't even apply to any other colleges!" After graduation, Torrie stayed in the area. "We have incredible weather here and lots of opportunity! We can enjoy all sorts of outdoor activities from skiing, tubing, all water sports, and we're also close to Mexico and the California coast. I like that we have it all- snow, mountains, and desert; being close to natural elements is important to me!"

Taj is also president of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. "I have volunteered with AFP for 20 years, and I can see across the valley there is a need to educate nonprofits and ourselves about ethical fundraising. We also need to learn how we can best match opportunities to help others with philanthropic generosity and the donors who can fulfill those needs. The topic of Philanthropy and Fundraising is a whole field of study, and I enjoy being a mentor to upcoming professionals. People have to understand that a nonprofit's greatest asset is the trust it has with its donors."

Torrie adds, "My philosophy of fundraising is rather old school--you need to develop partnerships with donors, sustain the relationship, and then recognize and retain these special donors. It's also important to share the impact of what their gifts do through your organization. It's definitely all about establishing relationships, which takes genuine time and effort." As CEO of Child Crisis Arizona, Torrie Taj keeps in mind its mission, to provide Arizona's children a safe environment, free from abuse and neglect, by creating strong and successful families. "We have to apply the best practices, and avoid the problem of getting stuck in just survival mode, only keeping track of day to day problems or issues. For strategic planning, as a leader I need to focus future fundraising efforts on endowment, planned giving, and sustainability. It is one thing to fund a building or a new program once, but raising and providing the funds to keep programs going is the long game for today and tomorrow!"

**What are your local volunteer activities?** I am a PROUD volunteer and supporter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals. I am currently the President of the Greater Arizona Chapter. Volunteering to lead and mentor other development professionals is a way I feel good about our entire nonprofit and philanthropic community. The Association of Fundraising Professionals is a great resource for the

community to make sure nonprofits support, guide and teach ethical fundraising and best practices to nonprofit leaders and development Professionals.

**Who inspired you to give back to your community?** Growing up in South Dakota I saw my grandmother and mother volunteering to help others and.....Midwesterners are so nice and always help each other, it was a way of life.

**Which fundraising event is your favorite?** It's a tie: AFP's National Philanthropy Day Leadership Awards Luncheon (Nov 9, 2016 Camelback Inn Marriott) where I absolutely LOVE seeing AFP and our local nonprofits and business community celebrating philanthropy of our community and individuals at this annual event, and the Child Crisis Arizona Fundraising Luncheon (October 20, 2016 Arizona Biltmore) where I am honored to invite the business community and individuals to a one hour lunch to learn the mission and vision of the incredible agency I have the joy and privilege of operating.

**Favorite restaurant?** Well for now, Brio has something all my kids like...and I truly enjoy the atmosphere and the food!

**Favorite movie?** The Sound of Music...YES ... it has a little bit of everything for me, singing, dancing, drama, love, humor and history.

**Favorite play?** Love all theater, ballet, musicals, opera, Broadway shows, no FAV I can think of. Need to experience more and would love to WIN Hamilton tickets!

**Favorite TV show?** Hmmmm... who has time for TV? I hardly turn it on but did enjoy watching two seasons of Reign on Netflix. Ohhhh, to wear those costumes.....the DRESSES and JEWELRY are AMAZING!

**Whom do you most admire, and why?** I most admire public servants or nonprofit leaders who work tirelessly to make our community and the world a better place: Mentor Michael Hughes, CEO of A New Leaf, and so many dedicated volunteer Board members I have worked with over the last 25 years.

**If your life were a movie, who would you want to play your part?** Meg Ryan

**Do you have any pets?** I am lucky to have "Lucky".

**When you move, what will your home tell its next owner about you?** That I enjoyed my patio and the relaxing sound of water.

**What's the best lesson you've learned through the years?** Two lessons: 1. It's sometimes easier to ask for forgiveness than permission to get things done! 2. Our strengths can be our biggest weakness.

**What was your first job?** Retail clerk at Miss Pred's, a trendy clothing store, banquet server, coffee runner at the Sheraton; all in high school, I don't remember what came first, but did them all with gusto and a smile!

**What is your greatest indulgence?** Dark Chocolate... all food....I eat what I want and ENJOY.

**What do you consider to be your greatest achievement?** My three wonderful kids.

**What is your most treasured possession?** Mother's Day gifts and cards are my most "treasured" possessions, but my newest hobby is buying jewelry on vacations / special occasions to hold my memories.

**What is the quality you most like in people?** Sincerity and genuineness

**Favorite books/writers?** Nicholas Sparks

**What is the trait you most deplore in others?** Negativity and dishonesty. My pet peeve is when someone tells me why something can't be done.

**What do you enjoy doing in your spare time?** Going to the movies or new restaurants.

**What would we be most surprised to know about you?** How about my Running of the Bulls experience in Spain?

**What is the best advice you have ever received?** "Choose a career that you will love forever" from my guidance counselor at ASU.

**What are some challenges facing nonprofits?** There is major competition in the marketplace for experienced, energetic and passionate professionals who are willing to lead and create solutions for people in need. The NEED (or demand) for services outweighs the current supply of human services provided from nonprofits. I believe the BIGGEST challenge for nonprofits is getting stuck in the routine day-to-day operations of survival while constantly seeking those additional resources to grow our services to meet the increasing needs of the community WHILE at the same time finding the time, energy, resources and consistent focus to advocate for long term solutions.